

March 31, 2007

In the glare of the corruption in the Memphis City Council, I suggest that the Charter Commission enact the following changes to the charter if they want real change and verifiable honesty in their city government.

- A charter section like the Shelby County charter sections which allow citizen generated referendums like the voters used in 1994 to set term limits on County Commissioners.
- An open records charter amendment requiring election commission reports of donations and expenditures to be submitted electronically in spreadsheet format so that they can be entered into a unified database and published for notification and verification of information.
- TERM LIMITS- Prevent elected officials from getting the tenure that gives them the position to sell their influence to developers and other buyers of political influence exhibited by Tennessee Waltz and Main Street Sweep.
- NO SALE OF MLGW WITHOUT VOTER APPROVAL- Because MLGW is piling up cash at the ratepayers expense, politicians want to get their hands on the cash. As of December 31, 2005, MLGW had \$167 million in unrestricted cash, up from \$111 million in one year. The law says that any surplus remaining after establishment of proper reserves, shall be devoted solely to the reduction of rates. Also the board of MLGW should be expanded to seven members to include two members from the largest Shelby county cities outside Memphis such as Germantown and Collierville, those two members to be appointed by the Mayors of those cities.
- THIGHTEN ETHICS RULES- No election official should be able to serve if he benefits from any contract involving City taxpayer money even if he recuses himself from voting on that particular contract or issue.
- PENSION REFORM- the January 2001 pension change has cost millions of dollars to date and will go on costing millions more as these elected and appointed officials retire. Since hardly any of the taxpaying public has a defined benefit pension plan anymore, a defined contribution plan should be instituted in the future for all newly hired public employees.
- OPEN RECORDS- Only by putting all important contract bids, responses to bids, selection justification, purchase orders, personnel salaries and benefits on the internet and by making open records access easier, can we keep the sunshine on government practices which politicians like to conceal. The current no bid purchase orders given under the ACS contract shield is an example of gross abuse and lack of transparency in bidding and awarding contracts.
- APPOINTEES- There are over 400 appointees whereas the charter, according to Sara Hall's reading, only allows about 110. This needs to be defined and limited to much less. The January 2001 pension resolution allowing elected and appointed officials to collect pensions and health benefits after only 12 years regardless of age has already cost millions and has the potential to cost \$60 million if all of the current eligible elected and appointed people retire under that provision.
- RESTRICT ELECTED OFFICIALS FROM VOTING MEMBERSHIP ON CITY AND COUNTY BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS- This is where the influence peddling starts and needs to be stopped.
- CONTRACTING AUTHORITY- Prohibit the Mayor, any Mayor, from signing any contract unless it has been approved and funded by the City Council.
- Reinstate a separate non political Park Commission as it was previously constituted before the City Council dissolved it to its detriment.

This can be done and passed if only the Charter Commission has the courage and resolve to propose it for the voters.

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